United Nations A/C.1/61/PV.1

General Assembly
Sixty-first session

Official Records

First Committee

1st meeting
Thursday, 28 September 2006, 3 p.m.
New York

Chairperson: Mrs. Juul ..... (Norway)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Statement by the Chairperson

The Chairperson: Allow me to extend a warm welcome to all delegations participating in the deliberations of the First Committee at the sixty-first session of the General Assembly. I look forward to working with all members of the Committee during the next few weeks. We will have much to do, but I am certain that we will be able to conduct our work in a cooperative and efficient manner.

It is indeed a great honour and privilege for my country and for me to have been elected as Chair of this important body. I deeply appreciate the confidence the Committee has placed in me. With the Committee's full support, I hope to guide its work to a successful conclusion at the end of this month. It goes without saying that I will rely greatly upon members' spirit of cooperation and flexibility.

I will also depend very much upon my colleagues in the Bureau, whom the Committee has already elected, namely, our three Vice-Chairpersons — Mr. Andy Rachmianto of Indonesia, Mr. Boštjan Malovrh of Slovenia and Mr. Federico Perazza of Uruguay — and our Rapporteur, Mr. Abdelhamid Gharbi of Tunisia. I am certain that the Committee will be able to benefit from their collective wisdom and expertise in disarmament issues.

I am also confident that the Committee will again receive the full support of the Department for Disarmament Affairs and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, headed by Mr. Nobuaki Tanaka and Mr. Chen Jian, respectively. Last but not least, the Committee will benefit greatly from the presence of our former colleague, Mr. Jarmo Sareva, the new Secretary of the First Committee, and his experienced team in the First Committee secretariat.

Organization of work

The Chairperson: In considering the Committee's work for the sixty-first session, I wish to draw the Committee's attention to document A/C.1/61/1, which contains a letter dated 18 September 2006 addressed to me by the President of the General Assembly and informing me that the General Assembly, at its 2nd plenary meeting, decided to allocate 16 disarmament and related international security agenda items to the First Committee for its consideration during this session.

Before I proceed to give a more detailed account of the programme of work and timetable contained in document A/C.1/61/CRP.1, I would like to remind the Committee that that document is based upon the tentative programme of work and timetable that was adopted by the Committee on 1 November 2005 as part of the effort to revitalize the work of the General Assembly (see A/C.1/60/PV.23).

Before I go any further, I would like to draw the Committee's attention to a small technical change in the conference room paper. An afternoon meeting was

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originally allocated for 24 October; however, there will be no meeting that day because it is an official United Nations holiday.

The programme of work and timetable itself was prepared in keeping with past practice and taking into account a number of initiatives proposed over the past several years, including in General Assembly decision 52/416 B, on the rationalization of the work of the First Committee. In this connection, I also took into account paragraph 36 of the annex to resolution 51/241, the first sentence of which reads as follows.

> "The First Committee and the Fourth Committee shall not meet simultaneously and may consider meeting in a sequential manner during the regular session of the General Assembly."

However, Members may have noted from document A/C.1/61/CRP.1 that during the first two days of the second week of the Committee's substantive session, on 9 and 10 October, both morning and afternoon meetings have been allocated to the First Committee, for the general debate, the informal exchange with the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs and other high United Nations officials and the thematic discussion of disarmament and international security agenda items. This is in line with the agreement reached last year by my predecessor and his counterpart from the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee).

In accordance with established practice, the First Committee will commence its substantive work on Monday, 2 October 2006. Members may recall that the General Committee recommended that the First Committee conclude its work by 31 October. The Committee will thus have a maximum of 23 meetings to consider the agenda items allocated to it by the General Assembly. The Committee will also have to consider and take action on its tentative programme of work for the next session under agenda item 110 concerning the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly.

Concerning item 118, "Programme planning", which has been allocated to all the Main Committees and to plenary meetings of the General Assembly, to enhance discussion of evaluation, planning, budgeting and monitoring reports, we will revert to this item if the General Assembly allocates any report under the item to our Committee. Consequently, I will make every effort to complete the work of the Committee as recommended by the General Committee. I therefore strongly appeal for the full cooperation of all delegations on this matter.

I would like to recall that during the sixtieth session, the First Committee had at its disposal a total of 24 meetings, of which it utilized 23, while having to consider a total of 21 disarmament-related agenda items, including the additional item on the question of Antarctica. Consequently, I believe that, with members' cooperation, we will be able to accomplish our task in a timely fashion.

As during previous sessions, the consideration of the items allocated to the First Committee will proceed in three phases, as currently reflected in the proposed programme of work and timetable.

The first phase, general debate on all items, will last from 2 to 9 October, for a total of seven meetings. The rolling list of speakers for this phase is currently open, and I am aware that quite a number of delegations have already inscribed their names on the list. I invite others to do the same as soon as possible. I would also like to remind delegations as they inscribe their names on the list of speakers that the rolling list means that they should make every effort to be prepared to intervene possibly even one meeting sooner than they had originally planned.

Based on the tentative programme of work and timetable that was adopted by the Committee in November last year, as contained in document A/C.1/61/CRP.1, it is my intention to close the list of speakers for the general debate on Tuesday, 3 October, at 6 p.m. Additionally, in order to efficiently use the resources allocated to us, I kindly request delegations to limit their statements to a maximum of 10 minutes for those speaking in their national capacity and 15 minutes for those speaking on behalf of several delegations. Needless to say, it is not mandatory to speak for 10 minutes. In that connection, it is my intention to introduce the use of "traffic lights" for this first phase of our work. In the event the Committee completes its general debate in fewer than the number of meetings allocated to it, I shall propose that we move to the next phase of our work.

The second phase of the Committee's work will be the structured thematic discussion on item subjects, as well as the introduction and consideration of all

draft resolutions and decisions submitted under all disarmament and related international security agenda items. For advance information, an indicative timetable based on the established practice of the Committee for the second phase of its work has been circulated to all delegations in document A/C.1/61/CRP.2. This phase will cover the period from the afternoon of Monday, 9 October to Friday, 20 October. A total of 10 meetings, or possibly 11 meetings in the event that we conclude the general debate earlier than planned, have been allocated for that purpose.

As indicated in document A/C.1/61/CRP.2, it is within this second phase that time has been allocated for an exchange of views with the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs and other high-level United Nations officials on the current state of affairs in the field of arms control and disarmament and the role of the respective organizations and on the follow-up of resolutions and decisions adopted by the Committee at its past session, including the presentation of reports. Furthermore, one meeting will also be used for a panel discussion with independent experts. As in previous years, these events will take place in an informal mode. One meeting, on 20 October, has been kept in reserve in case more time is required for the introduction of draft resolutions or other matters. I plan on providing the Committee with a more detailed explanation of the second phase of the Committee's work during the latter part of next week.

In order to facilitate the Committee's work and to provide sufficient time to delegations for consultations, as well as to give enough time to the Secretariat for the processing of draft resolutions in all official languages, the deadline for the submission of draft resolutions and decisions will be Wednesday, 11 October, at 6 p.m. I intend to maintain that deadline, and therefore appeal to all delegations to adhere strictly to it.

I would also encourage members to submit their draft resolutions and decisions as early as possible to give delegations enough time to seek the necessary instructions from their capitals and to consult sufficiently, so that the texts finally adopted reflect the greatest possible degree of agreement. Early submission of draft resolutions and decisions would also offer all delegations the opportunity to comment on them during the second phase, which is intended also for that purpose.

In addition, it is imperative that delegations submit those draft resolutions that might entail programme budget implications as early as possible, to give the Secretariat sufficient time to prepare the necessary statement on programme budget implications. I would like remind delegations that the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee need adequate time to review the programme budget implications of a draft resolution before it can be acted upon by the General Assembly.

Finally, the third and last phase of the work of the Committee, namely action on all draft resolutions and decisions, will be from Monday, 23 October, to Tuesday, 31 October; a total of six meetings have been set aside for this. Last year, the Committee concluded this final phase in six meetings, adopting 54 draft resolutions and six draft decisions. I urge all delegations to take note of that fact, and I request their full cooperation so that we are able to take action on all draft resolutions and decisions in a timely manner, particularly those with programme budget implications.

It is my intention to retain the voting procedure involving the grouping of draft resolutions by clusters, using as a basis the agreed seven clusters mentioned in the letter from the Chairman of the First Committee to the President of the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, pursuant to paragraph 3 of section C of the annex to resolution 58/316, on "Further measures for the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly". Once again, I shall provide the Committee with specific information on this final phase of the work in due course.

It is my firm belief that, based on the proposed programme of work and timetable that is now before members, the Committee will be able to consider efficiently all the agenda items allocated to it within the available time and to wrap up its work by Tuesday, 31 October 2006. I should like to remind delegations of the need to maintain the necessary spirit of compromise and flexibility in the process of implementing the proposed programme of work and timetable.

May I take it that the proposed draft programme of work and timetable, contained in document A/C.1/61/CRP.1, as orally revised, meets with the approval of the Committee?

It was so decided.

The Chairperson: I should like now to draw attention to the relevant rules and recommendations of the General Assembly affecting the work of the Main Committees, including those contained in decision 34/401, especially its provisions dealing with explanations of vote, rights of reply and budgetary and financial questions, which I intend to apply with the cooperation and assistance of all members of the First Committee.

In order to make full use of the time and facilities allocated to the Committee, I intend with the full cooperation of members to begin the meetings promptly at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. and to end at 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. respectively.

I would also like to draw attention to agenda item 5 as set out in document A/61/250, entitled "Election of the officers of the Main Committees", and also to rule 99 (a) of the rules of procedure, as amended by resolution 56/509 of 8 July 2002, which reads as follows.

> "All the Main Committees shall, at least three months before the opening of the session, elect a Chairman. Elections of the other officers provided for in rule 103 shall be held at the latest by the end of the first week of the session".

In view of the aforementioned, I would like to propose that the First Committee, in accordance with that resolution, should consider this item some time in June 2007, about three months before the opening of the sixty-second session of the General Assembly. If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Committee wishes to proceed accordingly.

It was so decided.

The Chairperson: Concerning the submission of draft resolutions, I wish to draw attention to paragraph 28 of document A/61/250, dated 12 September 2006 and entitled "Organization of the sixty-first regular session of the General Assembly, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items:, which reads as follows:

> "The General Committee noted and decided to bring to the attention of the General Assembly that the Secretary-General encourages Member States to transmit all draft resolutions and decisions in electronic form as well as on paper ... and wishes to inform the Member States that the submitters are responsible for ensuring that the electronic and paper versions of the draft resolutions and decisions are identical in content."

In this connection, I urge those member States wishing to submit draft resolutions or decisions to the Committee to kindly observe the following procedures. For submission of draft resolutions that are based on pre-existing resolutions, the officially issued version must be used as the base text, with all new text and changes to the old text clearly indicated in bold. Similarly, for revised draft resolutions, the original draft resolution issued on the Official Document System (ODS) must be used as the base text, with all revisions clearly indicated in bold.

Delegations are requested to follow the procedures and to submit a hard copy of the final text together with a diskette or send it via e-mail to the Secretariat for processing. Those delegations wishing to submit a draft resolution or decision are encouraged to contact the secretariat of the Committee for further information and assistance. Additionally, in order to facilitate the process, the secretariat of the Committee will again provide pre-existing resolutions for delegations in the form of a kit, both in hard copy and in electronic form, and has expressed its readiness to assist delegations in this respect.

At this stage, I should like to give the floor to the Secretary of the First Committee to inform the Committee of certain matters pertaining to the proceedings of the Committee.

Mr. Sareva (Secretary of the Committee): At the outset, I would like to stress that the Secretariat reaffirms its commitment to assist delegations in the smooth functioning of the First Committee.

The first piece of information has to do with the kits for draft resolutions and decisions, something that the Chair just referred to. In this connection, I should like to inform delegations that kits with pre-formatted draft resolutions in electronic form are available for sponsoring delegations, together with formatted sponsors lists. Those delegations that have not yet received the kits are encouraged to contact the Secretariat for assistance on this matter. We also stand ready to provide pre-formatted documents for any new draft resolutions or decisions.

I would like to use this opportunity to once again remind delegations that the deadline for the submission

of draft resolutions and decisions is 11 October at 6 p.m. The focal point for receiving all draft texts from delegations is Ms. Christa Giles with the Disarmament and Decolonization Affairs Branch of the Secretariat. Delegations are, once again, kindly requested to use the pre-formatted documents distributed as kits.

I would also like to note that there will be two sponsors lists for each draft resolution or decision. One list will be held by the sponsoring delegation and the other one by the Secretariat. The Secretariat feels that keeping the number of copies of the sponsors lists to a necessary minimum — that is two copies — will best preserve the integrity of the sponsors lists and minimize the possibility of error. All questions regarding lists of sponsors should likewise be addressed to Ms. Christa Giles.

The second piece of information concerns the list of delegations. On that issue, I would also like to kindly remind members to submit to the Secretariat, as soon as possible, the list of their delegations to the First Committee. The cut-off date for the processing of the list is 5 October. Any submission after that cut-off date will be issued in an addendum after the Committee session. There is a form available from the Secretariat, for listing delegations to all of the Main Committees.

Next I will refer to the Committee website. Following up requests from many delegations regarding the updating of the First Committee website, I would like to inform delegations that the website has been updated with information on the Bureau members and the United Nations staff servicing the Committee, including their names, telephone numbers and a short description of their functions. The website is a public site, so for obvious reasons it does not list the e-mail addresses of the Secretariat staff, but we will gladly share our e-mail addresses with interested delegations.

For those delegations not familiar with the main official United Nations website, it may be accessed at www.un.org. To reach the First Committee pages, click on "Main Bodies", then on "General Assembly". At the General Assembly site look for "Main Committees" under "Quick Links", and then for "The Disarmament and International Security Committee (First Committee)".

There has been so much discussion about the First Committee website, so I would like to stress that the website is maintained by the Department of Public Information and follows all pertinent standards of the Organization. It shares the same style and content policy regarding what can and cannot be placed on the site. For example, all official documents of the Committee, both A/C.1/61 and A/C.1/61/L series documents, will be available on the site as soon as they are issued.

As the website is multilingual, delegations will find information in all six official United Nations languages on the respective language pages.

However, due to current restrictions, we cannot put any informal documents on the site. Due to those system-wide policy restrictions placed on the content of the Committee's official website, the Secretariat is currently exploring the possibility of distributing conference room papers and other informal documents through other channels. One option could be to distribute unofficial documents through the un.int password-protected website used by permanent missions.

I would also like to inform members that we are currently exploring a project that would allow delegations in the future to sponsor resolutions electronically through a dedicated password-protected website. That project is currently under construction in the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, with the nickname of e-Co-sponsorship. The Secretariat is discussing modalities of involving the First Committee in that project. At this stage it is premature to say whether that feature will be added during the current session.

In the meantime, delegations are encouraged to contact my colleague Mr. Sergei Cherniavsky, who is the focal point for the website, if they have further questions about the website or about accessing Committee documents in electronic format.

The Chairperson: I give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Shamaa (Egypt): First of all, allow me to congratulate you, Madam, on your election to the Chair of the First Committee. You mentioned that document A/C.1/61/CRP.1 had been orally revised. Could you kindly read out the revision?

Also, could the programme of work indicate the date of the Eid al-Fitr holiday, in accordance with the United Nations calendar? Another issue is the structure of the thematic debate. Last year a practice was applied

in terms of the structure of the meetings; will that same structure be applied this year? In other words, are those meetings formal or informal? At the last session, such meetings would start as formal meetings then would shift to an informal setting.

The Chairperson: The only oral revision was that an afternoon meeting was originally scheduled on 24 October. However, there will be no meeting that day since it will be an official United Nations holiday: Eid al-Fitr.

Let me answer the final question by referring to the footnote in the indicative timetable that was distributed as document A/C.1/61/CRP.2. It says that each formal meeting during the thematic discussion will be divided into three segments, in line with last year's practice. The full answer should be in that footnote.

The Chairperson: As decided, the Committee will begin its substantive work on Monday, 2 October, at 10 a.m. sharp.

The meeting rose at 3.45 p.m.